

9/16/20 - Special Business Meeting

Present - Patrick D. McCabe, Roxanne Rebmann, Jim Grant, Erik Polkowski, Heather Cayea, Jody Brege, Deborah Forrestel, Robert Masse, Philip Kenline

Jim - Thank you everyone for joining us for this special meeting. Pledge to the Flag. Item #2 Superintendent's Report.

Pat - As this is a special meeting, I won't be going into any information or detail on how the first week and a half have gone. I will give you an update at our meeting next week. Briefly, I will say how pleased and proud I am of our kids in their preparedness and what the families had done to get them ready for school. I really did want to focus on our agenda items, which is you'll see that I recommended the appointment of coaches for this fall season. I want to give the Board just kind of a brief recap of what has been an exceedingly fast-paced and rapidly moving situation. It was a week ago today that the NYSPHSAA announced that their guidance was forth-coming, and they were moving the high-risk sports football, volleyball, and cheer to March 1, 2021, and every indication would be that the lower-risk sports would be moving forward. That was announced a week ago on Wednesday. Then last Friday, 9/11/20, they officially released the updated guidance that was initially released on the 9/4/20, and the final guidance plan was released last Friday on the 11th. That included specific information on the sports themselves, roles and responsibilities of coaches, athletes, parents and so on. Section 6 in the interim was doing some balloting and trying to get, so you have the state level and the section level. Section 6 was trying to get some information as to whether or not component districts would be participating in fall sports or not. They officially released that declaration today that Section 6 was moving ahead with sports. Again, I'm just telling you how fast things have had to move. In the interim though, the leagues, so underneath the sections are the leagues, Niagara Orleans League is the league that Akron participates in, were having some conversations about whether or not individual districts would be participating. Should the State Athletic Association and the section move forward and to what extent they anticipated student athletes would be playing? That's been kind of all going on behind the scenes, but the league meetings amongst the ADs really couldn't happen until they knew where the section was. Lots of conversations but no decisions made. Decisions were made at the league level really on Monday and Tuesday of this week. I will give you an example that Akron committed to modified sports, but I didn't find out until 2:30pm today that one of the modified sports, specifically girls modified soccer, wasn't going to even be offered or available to Akron athletes until 2:30pm today because that's when we found out from other teams around the league that they weren't going to offer. There was one team, but you can't really have a season with two teams. I share that background with you really just because parents, coaches, student athletes, have wanted to know what's going on and we wanted to be able to provide as much information as possible, but in the absence of some of those higher level decisions, our lower level decisions have been paused. I know that's been a source of frustration and confusion for families. Moving forward, I wanted to update the Board and any community members that are listening on Zoom. Some pretty significant changes to expect compared to previous seasons. For example, health screenings need to be completed prior to practices and competitions. Right now coaches will be responsible for doing some paper and pencil, you know the four questions that we've all seen, surveys that the parents have to attest to, and they bring those to practice. Hopefully, within a week's time, don't hold me to this, our app, where parents will get an alert and they can just click hopefully no to confirm that their child can participate, will be available to our student athletes as well as all of our kids coming in. We've been working on that, but sometimes these things with software and vendors and licenses, take a little bit of time. We've been working on that for quite a bit of time, so hopefully we're closer to that becoming a reality. Coaches will be responsible for collecting that data on individual student athletes and referees for the purpose of contact-tracing only. That information won't be stored or warehoused or shared. Should a student athlete or coach test positive, we need to know who they were in contact with during the school day and any extracurricular. If a student athlete, coach, or an official there's a red flag on the screen, they traveled to a restricted area, running a fever, they're not able to participate or stay on campus. Just like the student attendance. Within our league and other leagues there's been a lot of conversations about what to do with locker rooms. The ADs have determined the visiting team will not have access to locker rooms. They just want to be able to spread kids out, maintain the 6 feet. They will in some cases come prepared for their event, to the extent they can or do some minimal

changing, changing sneakers, things of that nature, prior to the event. Our kids will have designated spaces and I don't know what they are just yet, but this particular team or sport is where you'll change every time. We'll try not to share that space with any other. There may be a need to utilize some bathroom spaces, things of that nature, on a given day. There won't be any communal water sharing. Student athletes will be responsible to bring their own bottle with their name on it. Coaches, I think will encourage kids to bring at least two. We have refilling stations, but if you've seen kids sometimes dump it right in and you get this cross contamination thing going. We do have around the district our filling stations. They can bring them empty. A huge impact and a significant change is the guideline around fans and attendance. This is going to be tricky and complex. Student athletes are permitted to bring two individuals to watch them participate. I know we've all driven by youth soccer and youth baseball and seen it teaming with families and there's no restrictions and guidelines. You have to understand schools are held to a much different standard than the recreational programs are. That I think is going to be a significant shift and a challenge. We're thinking of a ticket system where on a given event, a student athlete will have to check in and will have two tickets they will have to distribute. We're not going to restrict it to parents. If a student athlete wants to invite a friend or a grandparent or a sibling. They're their two tickets. That will be a challenge for us. Some schools are considering not even allowing it. Some of the larger districts that get several hundred fans. When you have a district with thousands of kids just in the high school alone can be different. In addition to the parent handbook, parents are going to have to attest that they've read and understood the COVID-19 specific protocols for their sports. Just some other final thoughts. I mentioned we, Akron, we're looking to expand opportunities for kids to allow for modified. Not every district is doing that. We're able because our league offered boys and girls modified cross country and field hockey. As I mentioned, up until today modified girls soccer was on the table, then off the table because there wasn't enough interest elsewhere in our league. Kind of summation, comments. The athletic coordinator is meeting with coaches tomorrow, pending Board approval of appointment, to go over some of this stuff. Frankly, my own personal comments, I've been an advocate of seeing our kids get reengaged to normal activities here in school. Whether it's clubs or any form of extracurricular, athletics. But I will tell you I'm at the same time pleased that this could happen for our kids, I'm looking at it with an abundance of caution because it is another opportunity perhaps for the spread of the virus that obviously none of us want. When I had done my participation in the Section 6 survey, I asked for a September 28, 2020 start date. I was in the minority, so here we are with the September 21, 2020 start date. That was based on Section 6. I have some other things to share not related to athletics, but before I move on, any questions, thoughts, or comments?

Jim - I know we normally don't have discussion until we bring an item up for motion, but I think it's important given the topic that we talk about it before we move into the business part of the meeting. I did the Delegate Assembly last week. It was surprisingly well-attended in my opinion. There were twenty-some people there, which means there were 20 districts represented out of the 26 or 27 that are in Erie 1 BOCES. This was, when we did the round table, the point of discussion of how are people handling it, what are the concerns because each district is dealing with this in a different way. You have the range of West Seneca, which is fully remote, trying to decide whether or not to have athletics. You have Ken-Ton, which is in the exact same situation, where they're remote and trying to decide what to do with athletes. There are multiple school districts that are concerned about having athletics and the dichotomy of a remote student wanting to participate in athletics. Discussion of the health risks and the safety concerns that Pat's already talked about that we've talked about. The concern over spending the money on athletics when schools are facing aid cuts and cost increases to cover PPE. In some cases, board meetings have been extremely contentious, a number of districts shared. Debates and arguments with board members over how to proceed. One of the districts shared that they were unanimous in not supporting athletics, but they haven't voted yet. They discussed it at their meeting and hadn't had their vote. Things have changed, as Pat said, since last week Wednesday when this meeting was held. All over the place in discussion and concern in support of, in opposition to. A couple of the larger districts, some close to us, some further away from us, while their Boards are expressing concern, also voiced the opinion they can't see how in their sports-rich district they could not have athletics. How the community would allow or how the community would react to not approving athletics in the district. It was all over the place. I've heard those concerns here in the

district. I'm sure you have too, including the costs of having athletics. I wanted to share that just as a global to give you the input from our peers.

Jody - Can I ask about sport-ups and why they're not happening?

Pat - Couple of things there. The decision was made regarding sport-ups to focus on our student-athletes for JV, Varsity, and Modified, particularly the kids who have participated in those sports in the past and to scale it out. I was notified late today that there are middle school students who participated in JV last year, and they were informed that they couldn't sport-up. Some of the decision about sport-ups was made at the league level, ADs talking to one another and where they thought it was best for their student-athletes. However, that unique situation of a student-athlete who was in 7th grade last year and played JV is different. I don't know whether or not that was initially considered. Had an opportunity to speak to a parent, had an opportunity to investigate that based on being made aware of a parent's concern, was able to talk to our athletic coordinator and to say how could we essentially grandfather a child like that in to have the opportunity to stay with his or her team? We think that's possible. It'll require a little extra effort on the parent because the child has to be cleared by both their own doctor and the school doctor. One of the things that factored into it slightly, the global decision not the grandfathered decision, was what I mentioned earlier about timelines. As soon as it was determined that we're moving forward with sports, and honestly until the Board makes the vote, I still don't know, but again hedging our bets. As soon as it was determined that sports would be permitted, our athletic coordinator reached out to the school physician to say we need you to come in and do this testing. That individual, Dr. Schwab, is not available until the 28th. Those kids are going to miss 5 out of the 10 days of mandatory practice. Again, that unique situation of grandfathering, I think there's a work around for that.

Jody - Ok because I'm concerned that we have 8th graders who played on JV soccer. They can't go back to modified sports.

Pat - Correct.

Jody - They have to stay on JV or Varsity. Now we don't even have a modified girls soccer team. I think that these kids need to be able to play on the team they played last year.

Pat - Again, I told the one parent, I don't know if she's going to communicate with the others, I think there's three girls involved. I talked to her this evening and said call Wendy Pazderski, she will have no idea what you're talking about, but just call her and tell her you talked to me and to forward it to our athletic coordinator because I talked to him. That's a unique situation. The idea is we want kids to participate. Full transparency, those kids will have an opportunity to try out because it's a competitive sport, it's JV. I think we can help those families in that situation. Again, bear in mind, this is not sports like last year. The focus is on participation, play, and safety. For me, I have full respect to every individual's decision-making process and we're all in different situations, having sports or not having sports has never been about money or cost-saving for me as your Superintendent. It's been about safety. Can we do it safely? We rely on the NYSDOH, the governor who said you can have sports, the High School Athletic Association who said you can have sports under these conditions, the Section, now the leagues and the coaches bear a tremendous amount of responsibility to do it safely. I had an at-length conversation with our athletic coordinator today and I said I'm imploring upon you to press upon the coaches safety. If situations occur where we're not practicing social distancing, we're not hand washing, we're not cleaning the equipment between use, it's gonna result in kids getting sick. It's going to result in not only that sport not having enough children to play, it's going to result in school closure. The guidance is very clear right now. If you're in direct contact for more than 10 minutes with an individual, within 6 feet mask or no mask, you're out for 14 days. It only takes one child, one student-athlete or coach to close down a sport for the entire team. 14 days, times multiple kids and some of these coaches are teachers. I don't want people sick is what I'm trying to say. I just want people to understand the gravity of the health situation before the athletic situation so that we can do it safely. I love sports, you guys know that. I love seeing kids engage.

Phil - Just a question on the travel restrictions, as far as one county only. Is that going to impact our league, are kids going to be able to play their normal rotation?

Jody - It's one county over until October-something and then it changes.

Pat - I haven't seen a schedule. I know the league is working on a draft schedule. They haven't released it to the coaches yet, but they will. I haven't heard that it's been detrimental or that fact will be problematic.

Phil - Ok. And as far as transportation to away games, normally it's a bus. Are we in a situation where we're going to be sending two buses in order to get the teams to competitions.

Pat - It may be the case depending on the size of the team, yeah. Just speaking of transportation in general, we are offering modified, but the state says you're under no obligation to provide transportation or frankly we can't given our bus runs and the times. It is an elective. We're hoping parents can figure out ways to get their kids to and from.

Jim - Just to clarify that, so for modified sports if we approve them, there will be no bussing.

Jody - That's for practice. Not for games.

Jim - Ok.

Heather - We're still allowing virtual students to participate?

Pat - Yes. I'll move on, if there's more please.

Jim - We'll come back to it once we bring that item.

Pat - Two other quick items for me this evening. I just wanted to make you aware because I anticipate there could be something on the agenda next week regarding the Board's decision to potentially remain in an opt-out status with RPL-487 or rescind our status with RPL-487. On Monday of this week, Mrs. Tretter and I met with representatives from Buffalo Solar. I'm sharing this with you now, full context for next week. They have a permit that is already in an interconnectivity agreement, already signed with utility to allow them to begin a small scale solar installation project at ArrowHead Golf facility. .15 megawatt installation would provide electricity for that complex. My understanding is they're building a wedding and a hotel is in the works.

Jim - The wedding venue is already there.

Erik - They have the original building, they have a duplicate building. The hotel will go in between. It will be approximately 4 stories. They'll have a restaurant down on the first floor to accommodate that as well.

Pat - That's more information, I didn't meet with ArrowHead.

Erik - The intent of the solar farm is primarily to be self-contained and self-sustaining.

Pat - They are currently working on a pilot with the town. To their credit they came, they wanted to meet with us, explain things, kind of unlike our other situation. They're looking at breaking ground in October. I was very candid with them, I explained the history of where the Board was, there was potential maybe discussing and analyzing this at an upcoming meeting. I said why don't you send me a proposed pilot for that so that I at least have something in front of me and I can share more details. Based on that initial conversation, the structure of that pilot is exactly as the one being proposed by Borrego. They're all using the same NYSEDA template. It's \$5k per megawatt. It's still the district receiving between 60 and 65% of the taxable income through that. I heard 63% from them. Again, this is a significantly smaller project, but I wanted you to be aware of it. It may influence your thoughts should I be able to get you something

by next week. I guess two final things. The Board and I had discussed about putting a temporary hold on allowing the use of the district facilities interior until the end of November. However, we have been approached to hold a flu shot clinic here on October 22th. Given the strong recommendations that people get a flu shot, given what we know that the flu significantly impacts children much more so even than COVID-19 does. Children are much more likely to become symptomatic and get the flu and spread the flu. I would like to propose that we allow this use of our facilities for health and safety reasons for our community, for our students and community members, so I'm planning to allow that. I wanted to let the Board know that's kind of a break in what we talked about, but I think it's important. The last thing I have tonight is some congratulations to Mr. Kenline, Mr. Polkowski, Mr. Grant for being recognized as Shining Stars by the Erie County School Board Association. Your free chicken dinners await.

Jim - We talked about it at the delegate assembly last week. ECASB normally has an awards dinner based on your participation on a board, attending and being a part of a committee, attending advocacy training, the legislative trip, you get points. If you accumulate enough points you get shining star level, then you move up. There's like three or four levels. In lieu of doing an awards dinner, they're doing a drive-thru ceremony on October 1st you can drive over to ECASB and get your award. Drive up, get your picture with Dave Lowery, and get your two free Chiavetta's dinners. I believe they've opened it up, Dave sent an email out on this, they opened it up to everybody that's a board member. If you want to go up there, you get one free dinner. The three of us being shining stars get a second dinner. I believe you can also purchase additional dinners. You want to make a date night, you may have to buy one for your significant other. So that's what that is. Anything else? Moving on to #3 Personnel Non-Instructional. Our recommendation is that the Akron Central School Board of Education, upon the recommendation of Patrick D. McCabe, Superintendent of Schools does hereby approve the following non-instructional items, consent #3A-3B. These are the appointment of the coaches and support personnel for those fall sports that are allowed as well as a golf volunteer.

Bob - Moved.

Jody - Second.

Jim - Concerns, questions, comments at this point of time?

Jody - I mean you all know how I voted on this last week when we tabled this, but it's very disappointing to me we're giving our coaches two days. Two to get ready for their seasons on Monday. Two days is all we're giving them on top of all the pandemic and COVID-19 stuff that they have to go through and learn. It's disappointing for me.

Erik - I only have one comment and it's in regards to the one concern that I have is because we're going to have an off-set with seasons, we're going to have a potential there for additional athletes that may not have been in the sport they normally would have been in. I know we've discussed it previously in a board situation where one of the things I would like to see the athletic coordinator discuss with the coaches is to validate students that would like to participate that they are given the opportunity to participate and that cuts aren't something where it's immediate. I would like to see where they do an actual evaluation because I can foresee a parent coming back and saying my kid was cut and we have nothing to stand on other than the coach's evaluation. I know some coaches do an evaluation of their players so they know whether or not they're going to be a JV or Varsity player, whether they should be on the team or shouldn't be on the team. I just think given the opportunity, we need to have something there where the coach can say with some sort of authority, I did an evaluation. This is where I thought this player was a better pick, whether it be athletic ability, leadership, past performance, past experience. I just see it as a potential problem. If we don't have any sort of preparedness where the coach can respond or the coordinator can now respond saying our coaches are doing evaluations of the players. It's just kind of opening us up for potential argument and confrontation with the parent saying a student was picked strictly because maybe they're a good athlete in another sport. You can have that. You can have a player that is maybe a senior that's played for three years on varsity, two years on JV that was sported up. You

need some sort of ammunition to go back and say a coach did an evaluation and we haven't had that in the past. It's been something that's needed to be addressed and I just think given the situation, it's going to be more critical.

Jody - We have the potential for kids playing four sports this year.

Heather - Why was registration opened up? Was that to allow the fall to pick a different sport?

Pat - Registration was opened up to all kids. There is obviously an interest for the kids who typically play football expressed an interest to try out for other sports because football wasn't being offered at this time. I talked to the athletic coordinator, I talked to Mr. Dimitroff. One of the appointments you didn't see was strength and conditioning. Again, that was based on student safety. We do not have staff for the supervision at this point to make sure. Gyms just reopened. I'm not comfortable saying let's open up our weight room and our exercise areas and we can verify that we can keep our kids socially distant and clean the apparatus appropriately between every use. Having said that, I think that we can build our capacity in time. Quite honestly, the winter season will be on us very soon. Reintroduce our strength and conditioning programs and some of our student-athletes will sign up just for that, so they can get in shape and be physically fit and active to prevent injury and stay engaged. Again, I started my comments by saying it's a much different year. It's a much different season. I think when we review things in the lenses of how they were last year, the confusion and frustration sets in because it has to be different. To your point, Mr. Polkowski, I agree with you. There always has to be criteria for play. I coached for 14 years competitive travel hockey for a good portion of that time. During my parent meeting they were informed of the criteria to play. I had the unfortunate situation of cutting kids that were on my team the year before because someone better tried out. High school sports are competitive.

Erik - I totally agree. It's just something that needs to be addressed because it could be a situation too that you have a 6 year athlete on there and they don't make the team because there was somebody that was better at that skill. Again, either way you're going to need to quantify one was picked over the other.

Pat - I don't know our coaches well enough to know their philosophies. As coach I was a play and have fun and build character, love the sport for the rest of your life. The score sheet mattered less to me. Other individuals are different, I understand that. One of the points I was making to Steve and JJ was about participation and fun this season. I also think our coaches are aware that kid you might cut as a sophomore, you're gonna need that kid to try out in his junior year. Be aware that it stings, kids are fragile at 14 and 15 and 16 and 17. If they get cut they might not want to come back next season. I know for a fact that Steve and JJ are going to bring that point up to our coaches. Still, each child should have a fair opportunity to make a team based on their skill.

Erik - Two kind of follow ups in regards to that. Is there going to be a clear, are they going to verify with the coaches in regards to benches? You're going to have a greater participation rate, therefore are you going to carry a larger bench? In the case of some, you're not going to have modified sports. Just that there's a clear consistent message. I don't want to see that one sport has three players sitting on the bench and another sport has six or seven. It needs to be a uniform consideration.

Pat - I can talk to them about that. When you first said benches, I was thinking about the benches. You're talking about rosters. I don't know. I have not had that conversation with them.

Erik - I thought I had read somewhere that there could be the allotment that benches could be extended because the roster could be higher.

Pat - I am not aware of that, but I may have just missed that.

Erik - Along the same lines with numbers and opposite side of the field benches. Based off of that number, what is the state giving guidelines in regards to saying you said two fans per player? Does that mean playing basketball, we have five on the floor and ten in the stand? Or talking five on the floor plus the five on the bench? Just to clarify.

Pat - My understanding would be team members.

Erik - That would be my assumption as well, but I'm not going to assume.

Pat - But in regard to benches not rosters. Just like you see here in classrooms where there's been an elimination. There is going to be the elimination to the extent possible of spectators sitting on benches. We're going to encourage parents to bring chairs and socially distance. I might as well tell you what I know will be a controversial issue. We're seeking more information on this. Swimming. If you're going to maintain 6 feet of social distance, there's not room on the pool deck for that. There are 45 seats available in the stands. Those seats would have to be used by student athletes and not parents. I will duck and cover when I see Mr. Masse coming that day. One of the things that we have done and again waiting for that, is purchased, the Huddle Software program so we can livestream. Again, Akron is a small district with beautiful facilities. Larger districts are talking no parents in any sport. We're all making these individual decisions. We will be I'm guessing by the public opinion wrong in all of them. I will tell you that they're well intended to keep people safe. Swimming, they just measured today. They have room for 45. So any kind of dual meet is going to be really problematic.

Phil - Why I Home Cameras. \$27 a piece. You send out an email address with a password. They log in. They can watch what's going on. That's how we're doing our distance learning with our kids. The neat thing about it is our kids can communicate with us. We can't see them, they can communicate with us. They have a question, they push a little button and a voice magically appears in the classroom.

Jim - Additional thoughts, comments? I just want to share as Mr. McCabe said, I am a very strong believer that each child has their reason for coming to school and their special talent. Whether it be athletics, academics, music. While I'm very concerned about the safety for our children, this is very important for that student and multiple students will do better in school if they can participate on a sports team. I am going to approve this personally with a lot of reservation. I recognize, Mrs. Brege, your concern about two days, but given the dynamics of what's going on, I stand by our decision to wait until this week. I know it puts our coaches and our athletes behind. If there's no additional comments, we can vote on this item.

Roxanne - Motion carried.

Jim - Motion carried. Thank you everyone. I appreciate your concerns and sharing your opinions as always. Item #4 is Executive Session. We do have a need to go into Executive Session tonight to discuss the employment history of particular people. If I may have a motion.

Phil - So moved.

Debbie - Second.

Jim - Any questions or comments? Motion carried. We are in Executive Session at 7:45pm. We do not anticipate conducting any business after we come out of Executive Session. I thank any members of the community that joined us for tonight's meeting.